What Is Metaphysics?

Translated by David Farrell Krell[1]

[1] "What is metaphysics?" The question awakens expectations of a discussion about metaphysics. This we will forgo. Instead we will take up a particular metaphysical question. In this way it seems we will let ourselves be transposed directly into metaphysics. Only in this way will we provide metaphysics the proper occasion to introduce itself.

Our plan begins with the unfolding of a metaphysical inquiry, then tries to elaborate the question, and concludes by answering it.

THE UNFOLDING OF A METAPHYSICAL INQUIRY

From the point of view of sound common sense, philosophy is in Hegel's words "the inverted world." Hence the peculiar nature of our undertaking requires a preliminary sketch. The sketch will develop out of a twofold character of metaphysical interrogation.

First, every metaphysical question always encompasses the whole range of metaphysical problems. Each question is itself always the whole. Therefore, second, every metaphysical question can be asked only in such a way that the questioner as such is also there within the question, that is, is placed in question. From this we conclude that metaphysical inquiry must be posed as a whole and from the essential position of the existence [*Dasein*] that questions. We are questioning, here and now, for ourselves. Our existence – in the community of researchers, teachers, and students – is determined by science. What is happening to us, essentially, in the grounds of our existence, when science has become our passion?

[2] The scientific fields are quite diverse. The ways they treat their objects of inquiry differ fundamentally. Today only the technical organization of universities and faculties consolidates this multiplicity of dispersed

disciplines; the practical establishment of goals by each discipline provides the only meaningful source of unity. Nonetheless, the rootedness of the sciences in their essential ground has atrophied.

Yet when we follow their most proper intention, in all the sciences we adopt a stance toward beings themselves. Precisely from the point of view of the sciences, no field takes precedence over another, neither nature over history nor vice versa. No particular way of treating objects of inquiry dominates the others. Mathematical knowledge is no more rigorous than philological-historical knowledge. It merely has the character of "exactness," which does not coincide with rigor. To demand exactness in the study of history is to violate the idea of the specific rigor of the humanities. The relation to the world that pervades all the sciences as such lets them seek beings themselves in order to make them objects of investigation and to determine their grounds – in each case according to their particular content and manner of being. According to the idea behind them, in the sciences we approach what is essential in all things.

This distinctive relation to the world in which we turn toward beings themselves is supported and guided by a freely chosen stance of human existence. To be sure, man's prescientific and extrascientific activities also are related to beings. But science is exceptional in that, in a way peculiar to it, it gives the matter itself explicitly and solely the first and last word. In such impartiality of inquiring, determining, and grounding, a peculiarly delineated submission to beings themselves obtains, such that beings are allowed to reveal themselves. This position of service in research and theory evolves in such a way as to become the ground of the possibility [3] of a proper though limited leadership in the whole of human existence. The special relation science sustains to the world and the human stance that guides it can of course be fully grasped only when we see and comprehend what happens in the relation to the world thus attained. The human being – one being among others – "pursues science." In this "pursuit" nothing less transpires than the irruption by one being called "the human being" into the whole of beings, indeed in such a way that in and through this irruption beings break open and show what they are and how they are. The irruption that breaks open, in its way, helps beings to themselves for the first time.

This trinity – relation to the world, stance, and irruption – in its radical unity brings a luminous simplicity and aptness of Da-sein to scientific existence. If we are to take explicit possession of the Dasein illuminated in this way for ourselves, then we must say:

That to which the relation to the world refers are beings themselves – and nothing besides.[a]

That from which every stance takes its guidance are beings themselves – and nothing further.

That with which the scientific confrontation in the irruption occurs are beings themselves – and beyond that, nothing.

But what is remarkable is that, precisely in the way scientific man secures to himself what is most properly his, he speaks, whether explicitly or not,[2] of something different. What should be examined are beings only, and besides that – nothing; beings alone, and further – nothing; solely beings, and beyond that – nothing.

What about this nothing? Is it an accident that we talk this way so automatically? Is it only a manner of speaking – and nothing besides?

However, why do we trouble ourselves with this nothing? The nothing is rejected precisely by science, given up as a nullity. But when we give up the nothing in such a way do we not concede it? Can we, however, speak of concession when we concede nothing? But perhaps [4] our confused talk already degenerates into an empty squabble over words. Against it, science must now reassert its seriousness and soberness of mind, insisting that it is concerned solely with beings. The nothing – what else can it be for science but an outrage and a phantasm? If science is right, then only one thing is sure: science wishes to know nothing of the nothing. Ultimately this is the scientifically rigorous conception of the nothing. We know it, the nothing, in that we wish to know nothing about it.

Science wants to know nothing about the nothing. But even so it is certain that when science tries to express its own proper essence[b] it calls upon the nothing for help. It has recourse to what it rejects. What duplicitous[c] state of affairs reveals itself here?

With this reflection on our existence at this moment as an existence determined by science we find ourselves enmeshed in a controversy. In the course of this controversy a question has already unfolded. It only requires explicit formulation: How is it with the nothing?

[a] First edition, 1929: People have passed off this additional remark following the dash as arbitrary and contrived, without knowing that Taine, who may be taken as the representative and sign of an entire era, the one that still prevails, knowingly employs this formula to characterize his fundamental position and intent.

[b] Fifth edition, 1949: Its positive and exclusive stance toward beings.

[c] Third edition, 1931: Ontological difference.
Fifth edition, 1949: Nothing as "being."

THE ELABORATION OF THE QUESTION

The elaboration of the question of the nothing must bring us to the point where an answer becomes possible or the impossibility of any answer becomes clear. The nothing is conceded. With a studied indifference science abandons it as what "there is not."

All the same, we shall try to ask about the nothing. What is the nothing? Our very first approach to this question has something unusual about it. In our asking we posit the nothing in advance as something that "is" such and such; we posit it as a being. But that is exactly what it is distinguished from.[a] Interrogating the nothing – asking what and how it, the nothing, [5] is – turns what is interrogated into its opposite. The question deprives itself of its own object.

Accordingly, every answer to this question is also impossible from the start. For it necessarily assumes the form: the nothing "is" this or that. With regard to the nothing, question and answer alike are inherently absurd.

But it is not science's rejection that first of all teaches us this. The commonly cited ground rule of all thinking, the proposition that contradiction is to be avoided, universal "logic" itself, lays low this question. For thinking, which is always essentially thinking about something, must act in a way contrary to its own essence when it thinks of the nothing.

Since it remains wholly impossible for us to make the nothing into an object, have we not already come to the end of our inquiry into the nothing – assuming that in this question "logic"[b] is of supreme importance, that the intellect is the means, and thought the way, to conceive the nothing originally and to decide about its possible unveiling?

But are we allowed to tamper with the rule of "logic"? Is not intellect the taskmaster in this question of the nothing? Only with its help can we at all define the nothing and pose it as a problem – which, it is true, only devours itself. For the nothing is the negation of the totality of beings; it is nonbeing pure and simple. But with that we bring the nothing under the higher determination of the negative, viewing it, it seems,[3] as the negated. However, according to the reigning and never-challenged doctrine of "logic," negation is a specific act of the intellect. How then can we in our question of the nothing, indeed in the question of its questionability, wish to brush the intellect aside? Yet are we altogether sure about what we are presupposing in this matter? Do the "not," negatedness, and thereby

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: The distinction, the difference.
[b] First edition, 1929: I.e., logic in the usual sense, what one takes to be logic.

negation too represent the higher determination under which the nothing falls as a particular kind of negated matter? Is the nothing given only because the "not," i.e., negation, is [6] given? Or is it the other way around? Are negation and the "not" given only because the nothing is given? That has not been decided; it has not even been raised expressly as a question. We assert that the nothing is more originary[a] than the "not" and negation.

If this thesis is right, then the possibility of negation as an act of the intellect, and thereby the intellect itself, are somehow dependent upon the nothing. Then how can the intellect hope to decide about the nothing? Does the ostensible absurdity of question and answer with respect to the nothing in the end rest solely in a blind conceit[b] of the far-ranging intellect?

But if we do not let ourselves be misled by the formal impossibility of the question of the nothing, if we pose the question in spite of this, then we must at least satisfy what remains the basic demand for the possible advancing of every question. If the nothing itself is to be questioned as we have been questioning it, then it must be given beforehand. We must be able to encounter it.

Where shall we seek the nothing? Where will we find the nothing? In order to find something must we not already know in general that it is there? Indeed! At first and for the most part human beings can seek only when they have anticipated the being at hand of what they are looking for. Now, the nothing is what we are seeking. Is there ultimately such a thing as a search without that anticipation, a search to which pure discovery belongs?

Whatever we may make of it, we are acquainted with the nothing, if only as a word we rattle off every day. For this common nothing that glides so inconspicuously through our chatter, blanched with the anemic pallor of the obvious, we can without hesitation furnish even a "definition":

The nothing is the complete negation of the totality of beings.

Does not this characterization of the nothing ultimately provide an indication of the direction from which alone the nothing can come to meet us?

[7] The totality of beings must be given in advance so as to be able to fall prey straightaway to negation – in which the nothing itself would then be manifest.

But even if we ignore the questionableness of the relation between negation and the nothing, how should we who are essentially finite make the whole of beings totally accessible in itself and also for us? We can of course think the whole of beings in an "idea," then negate what we have imagined

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: Ordering in terms of origin.
[b] Fifth edition, 1949: The blind conceit: the *certitudo* of the *ego cogito*, subjectivity.

in our thought, and thus "think" it negated. In this way we do attain the formal concept of the imagined nothing but never the nothing itself. But the nothing is nothing, and if the nothing represents total indistinguishability no distinction can obtain between the imagined and the "proper" nothing. And the "proper" nothing itself – is not this the camouflaged but absurd concept of a nothing that is? For the last time now the objections of the intellect would call a halt to our search, whose legitimacy, however, can be demonstrated only on the basis of a fundamental experience of the nothing.

As surely as we can never comprehend absolutely the whole of beings in themselves we certainly do find ourselves stationed in the midst of beings that are unveiled somehow as a whole. In the end an essential distinction prevails between comprehending the whole of beings in themselves and finding oneself [*Sichbefinden*] in the midst of beings as a whole. The former is impossible in principle. The latter happens all the time in our Dasein. It does seem as though we cling to this or that particular being, precisely in our everyday preoccupations, as though we were completely lost in this or that region of beings. No matter how fragmented our everyday existence may appear to be, however, it always deals with beings in a unity of the "whole," if only in a shadowy way. Even and precisely when we are not actually busy with things or ourselves, this "as a whole" comes over us – for example, in authentic boredom. Such boredom is still distant when it is only this book [8] or that play, that business or this idleness, that drags on and on. It irrupts when "one is bored." Profound boredom, drifting here and there in the abysses of our existence like a muffling fog, removes all things and human beings and oneself along with them into a remarkable indifference. This boredom manifests beings as a whole.

Another possibility of such manifestation is concealed in our joy in the presence of the Dasein – and not simply of the person – of a human being whom we love.

Such being attuned, in which we "are" one way or another and which determines us through and through, lets us find ourselves among beings as a whole. Finding ourselves attuned not only unveils beings as a whole in various ways, but this unveiling – far from being merely incidental – is also the fundamental occurrence of our Da-sein.

What we call a "feeling" is neither a transitory epiphenomenon of our thinking and willing comportment, nor simply an impulse that provokes such comportment, nor merely a present condition we have to find some way of coping with.

But just when moods of this sort bring us face to face with beings as a whole they conceal from us the nothing we are seeking. We will now come

to share even less in the opinion that the negation of beings as a whole that are manifest to us in attunement places us before the nothing. Such a thing could happen only in a correspondingly originary attunement that in the most proper sense of unveiling makes manifest the nothing.

Does such an attunement, in which man is brought before the nothing itself, occur in human existence?

It can and does occur, although rarely enough and only for a moment, in the fundamental mood of anxiety. By such anxiety we do not mean the quite common anxiousness, ultimately reducible to fearfulness, which all too readily comes over us. Anxiety is fundamentally different from fear. We become afraid always in the face of this or that [9] particular being that threatens us in this or that particular respect. Fear in the face of something is also in each case a fear concerning something in particular. Because fear possesses this trait of being "fear in the face of" and "fear concerning," he who fears and is afraid is captive to the mood in which he finds himself. Striving to rescue himself from this particular thing, he becomes unsure of everything else and completely "loses his head."

Anxiety does not let such confusion arise. Much to the contrary, a peculiar calm pervades it. Anxiety is indeed anxiety in the face of . . . , but not in the face of this or that thing. Anxiety in the face of . . . is always anxiety concerning . . . , but not concerning this or that. The indeterminateness of that in the face of which and concerning which we become anxious is no mere lack of determination but rather the essential impossibility of determining it. In the following familiar phrase[4] this indeterminateness comes to the fore.

In anxiety, we say, "one feels uncanny." What is "it" that makes "one" feel uncanny? We cannot say what it is before which one feels uncanny. As a whole it is so for one. All things and we ourselves sink into indifference.[a] This, however, not in the sense of mere disappearance. Rather, in their very receding, things turn toward us. The receding of beings as a whole, closing in on us in anxiety, oppresses us. We can get no hold on things. In the slipping away of beings only this "no hold on things" comes over us and remains.

Anxiety makes manifest the nothing.

We "hover" in anxiety. More precisely, anxiety leaves us hanging, because it induces the slipping away of beings as a whole. This implies that we ourselves – we humans who are in being[b] – in the midst of beings slip

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: Beings no longer speak to us.
[b] Fifth edition, 1949: But not the human being as the being human "of" Da-sein.

away from ourselves. At bottom therefore it is not as though "you" or "I" feel uncanny; rather, it is this way for some "one." In the altogether unsettling experience of this hovering where there is nothing to hold on to, pure Da-sein[a] is all that is still there.

Anxiety robs us of speech. Because beings as a whole slip away, so that precisely the nothing crowds around, all utterance of the "is" falls silent in the face of the nothing. That in the uncanniness [10] of anxiety we often try to shatter the vacant stillness with compulsive talk only proves the presence of the nothing. That anxiety unveils the nothing is immediately demonstrated by human beings themselves when anxiety has dissolved. In the lucid vision sustained by fresh remembrance we must say that that in the face of which and concerning which we were anxious was "properly" – nothing. Indeed, the nothing itself – as such – was there.[b]

With the fundamental attunement of anxiety we have arrived at that occurrence in Dasein in which the nothing is manifest and from which it must be interrogated.

How is it with the nothing?

THE RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION

We have already won the answer that for our purposes is at least at first the only essential one when we take heed that the question of the nothing remains actually posed. This requires that we actively complete the transformation of the human being[c] into the Da-sein that every instance of anxiety occasions in us, in order to get a grip on the nothing announced[d] there as it makes itself known. At the same time this demands that we expressly hold at a distance those designations of the nothing that do not result from its claims.

The nothing unveils itself in anxiety – but not as a being. Just as little is it given as an object. Anxiety is no kind of grasping of the nothing. All the same, the nothing becomes manifest in and through anxiety, although, to repeat, not in such a way that the nothing becomes manifest in our uncanniness[e] quite "apart from" beings as a whole. Rather, we said that in

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: The Da-sein "in" the human being.
[b] Fifth edition, 1949: Which means: it unveiled itself; revealing and attunement.
[c] Fifth edition, 1949: As subject! But Da-sein is already experienced thoughtfully here in a preliminary way, and only for this reason has it become possible to pose the question "What is metaphysics?" here.
[d] Fifth edition, 1949: Revealing.
[e] Fifth edition, 1949: Uncanniness and unconcealment.

anxiety the nothing is encountered at one with beings as a whole. What does this "at one with" mean?[a]

In anxiety beings as a whole become superfluous. In what sense does this happen? Beings are not annihilated by anxiety, so that nothing is left. How [11] could they be, when anxiety finds itself precisely in utter impotence with regard to beings as a whole? Rather, the nothing makes itself known with beings and in beings expressly as a slipping away of the whole.

No kind of annihilation of the whole of beings in themselves takes place in anxiety; just as little do we produce a negation of beings as a whole in order to attain the nothing for the first time. Apart from the consideration that the explicit enactment of a negating assertion remains foreign to anxiety as such, we also come always too late with such a negation that should produce the nothing. The nothing rises to meet us already before that. We said it is encountered "at one with" beings that are slipping away as a whole.

In anxiety there occurs a shrinking back before . . . that is surely not any sort of flight but rather a kind of entranced calm. This "back before" takes its departure from the nothing. The nothing itself does not attract; it is essentially repelling. But this repulsion is itself as such a parting gesture toward beings that are submerging as a whole. This wholly repelling gesture[b] toward beings that are slipping away as a whole, which is the action of the nothing that closes in on Dasein in anxiety, is the essence of the nothing: nihilation. It is neither an annihilation of beings nor does it spring from a negation. Nihilation will not submit to calculation in terms of annihilation and negation. The nothing itself nihilates.[c]

Nihilation is not some fortuitous incident. Rather, as the repelling gesture toward beings as a whole in their slipping away, it manifests these beings in their full but heretofore concealed strangeness as what is radically other – with respect to the nothing.

In the clear night of the nothing of anxiety the original openness of beings as such arises: that they are beings – and not nothing. But this "and not nothing" we add in our talk is not some kind of appended [12] clarification. Rather, it makes possible in advance[d] the manifestness of beings in general. The essence of the originally nihilating nothing lies in this, that it brings Da-sein for the first time before[e] beings as such.

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: The distinction.
[b] Fifth edition, 1949: Repelling: beings by themselves; gesturing toward: the *being* of beings.
[c] Fifth edition, 1949: Prevails essentially, endures as nihilation, grants the nothing.
[d] Fifth edition, 1949: I.e., being.
[e] Fifth edition, 1949: Specifically before the being of beings, before the distinction.

Only on the ground of the original manifestness of the nothing can human Dasein approach and penetrate beings. But since Dasein in its essence adopts a stance toward beings – those which it is not and that which it is – it emerges as such existence in each case from the nothing already manifest.

Da-sein means[a]: being held out into the nothing.

Holding itself out into[b] the nothing, Dasein is in each case already beyond beings as a whole. Such being beyond beings we call *transcendence.* If in the ground of its essence Dasein were not transcending, which now means, if it were not in advance holding itself out into the nothing, then it could never adopt a stance toward beings[c] nor even toward itself.

Without the original manifestness of the nothing, no selfhood and no freedom.[d]

With that the answer to the question of the nothing is gained. The nothing is neither an object nor any being at all. The nothing comes forward neither for itself nor next to beings, to which it would, as it were, adhere. For[e] human Dasein, the nothing makes possible the manifestness of beings as such. The nothing does not merely serve as the counterconcept of beings; rather, it originally belongs to their essential unfolding[f] as such. In the being of beings the nihilation of the nothing occurs.

But now a suspicion we have been suppressing for too long must finally find expression. If Dasein can adopt a stance toward beings only by holding itself out into the nothing and can exist only thus, and if the nothing is originally manifest only in anxiety, then must we not hover in this anxiety constantly in order to be able to exist at all? And have we not ourselves confessed that this original anxiety is rare? But above all else, we all do exist and comport ourselves toward beings [13] that we may or may not be – without this anxiety. Is this not an arbitrary invention and the nothing attributed to it a flight of fancy?

Yet what does it mean that this original anxiety occurs only in rare moments? Nothing else than that the nothing is at first and for the most part distorted with respect to its originary character. How, then? In this way: We usually lose ourselves altogether among beings in a certain way. The

[a] First edition, 1929: (1) inter alia, not only, (2) the consequence is not: therefore everything is nothing, but the reverse: taking over and apprehending beings, being and finitude.

[b] Fifth edition, 1949: Who holds originarily?

[c] Fifth edition, 1949: I.e., nothing and being the Same.

[d] Fifth edition, 1949: Freedom and truth in the lecture "On the Essence of Truth."

[e] Fifth edition, 1949: Not "through."

[f] Fifth edition, 1949: Essence: verbally; essential unfolding of being.

more we turn toward beings in our preoccupations the less we let beings as a whole slip away as such and the more we turn away from the nothing. Just as surely do we hasten into the public superficies of our existence.

And yet this constant if ambiguous turning away from the nothing accords, within certain limits, with the most proper significance of the nothing. In its nihilation the nothing directs us precisely toward beings.[a] The nothing nihilates incessantly without our properly knowing of this occurrence in the manner of our everyday knowledge.

What testifies to the constant and widespread though distorted manifestness of the nothing in our existence more compellingly than negation? But negation does not conjure the "not" out of itself as a means for making distinctions and oppositions in whatever is given, inserting itself, as it were, in between what is given. How could negation produce the "not" from itself when it can negate only if something negatable is already granted to it? But how could the negatable and what is to be negated be viewed as something susceptible to the "not" unless all thinking as such has already caught sight of the "not"? But the "not" can become manifest only when its origin, the nihilation of the nothing in general, and therewith the nothing itself, is disengaged from concealment. The "not" does not originate through negation; rather, negation is grounded in the "not"[b] that springs from the nihilation of the nothing. But negation is also only one way of nihilating, that is, only one sort of comportment that has been grounded beforehand in the nihilation of the nothing.

[14] In this way the above thesis in its main features has been proven: the nothing is the origin of negation, not vice versa. If the power of the intellect in the field of inquiry into the nothing and into being is thus shattered, then the destiny of the reign of "logic"[c] in philosophy is thereby decided. The idea of "logic" itself disintegrates in the turbulence of a more originary questioning.

No matter how much or in how many ways negation, expressed or implied, permeates all thought, it is by no means the sole authoritative witness of the manifestness of the nothing belonging essentially to Dasein. For negation cannot claim to be either the sole or the leading kind of nihilative comportment in which Dasein remains shaken by the nihilation of the nothing. Unyielding antagonism and stinging rebuke have a more abysmal source than the measured negation of thought. Galling failure and

[a] Fifth edition, 1949: Because *into* the being of beings.

[b] First edition, 1929: And yet here – as elsewhere in the case of assertion – negation is conceived in too retrospective and extrinsic a manner.

[c] First edition, 1929: "Logic," i.e., the *traditional* interpretation of thinking.

merciless prohibition require some deeper answer. Bitter privation is more burdensome.

These possibilities of nihilative comportment – forces in which Dasein bears its thrownness without mastering it – are not types of mere negation. That does not prevent them, however, from speaking out in the "no" and in negation. Indeed, here for the first time the barrenness and range of negation betray themselves. The saturation of Dasein by nihilative comportment testifies to the constant though doubtlessly obscured manifestation of the nothing that only anxiety originally unveils. But this implies that the originary anxiety in Dasein is usually repressed. Anxiety is there. It is only sleeping. Its breath quivers perpetually through Dasein, only slightly in what makes us "jittery," imperceptibly in the "Oh, yes" and the "Oh, no" of men of affairs; but most readily in the reserved, and most assuredly in those who are basically daring. But those daring ones are sustained by that on which they expend themselves – in order thus to preserve the ultimate grandeur of Dasein.

[15] The anxiety of those who are daring cannot be opposed to joy or even to the comfortable enjoyment of tranquilized bustle. It stands – outside all such opposition – in secret alliance with the cheerfulness and gentleness of creative longing.

Originary anxiety can awaken in Dasein at any moment. It needs no unusual event to rouse it. Its sway is as thoroughgoing as its possible occasionings are trivial. It is always ready, though it only seldom springs, and we are snatched away and left hanging.

Being held out into the nothing – as Dasein is – on the ground of concealed anxiety makes the human being a lieutenant of the nothing. We are so finite that we cannot even bring ourselves originally before the nothing through our own decision and will. So abyssally does the process of finitude entrench itself in Dasein that our most proper and deepest finitude refuses to yield to our freedom.

Being held out into the nothing – as Dasein is – on the ground of concealed anxiety is its surpassing of beings as a whole. It is transcendence.

Our inquiry concerning the nothing is to bring us face to face with metaphysics itself. The name "metaphysics" derives from the Greek μετὰ τὰ φυσικά. This peculiar title was later interpreted as characterizing the questioning that extends μετά or *trans* – "over" – beings as such.

Metaphysics is inquiry beyond or over beings that aims to recover them as such and as a whole for our grasp.

In the question concerning the nothing such an inquiry beyond or over beings, beings as a whole, takes place. It proves thereby to be a

"metaphysical" question. At the outset we attributed a twofold character to such questions: first, each metaphysical question always encompasses the whole of metaphysics; second, every metaphysical question in each case implicates the questioning Dasein in the question.

[16] To what extent does the question concerning the nothing permeate and embrace the whole of metaphysics?

For a long time metaphysics has expressed the nothing in a proposition clearly susceptible of more than one meaning: *ex nihilo nihil fit* – from nothing, nothing comes to be. Although in discussions of the proposition the nothing itself never becomes a problem in its own right, the respective views of the nothing nevertheless express the guiding fundamental conception of beings. Ancient metaphysics conceives the nothing in the sense of nonbeing, that is, unformed matter, matter that cannot take form as an in-formed being that would offer an outward aspect (εἶδος). To be in being is to be a self-forming form that exhibits itself as such in an image (as something envisaged). The origins, legitimacy, and limits of this conception of being are as little discussed as the nothing itself. On the other hand, Christian dogma denies the truth of the proposition *ex nihilo nihil fit* and thereby bestows on the nothing a transformed significance, the sense of the complete absence of beings apart from God: *ex nihilo fit – ens creatum* [From nothing comes – created being]. Now the nothing becomes the counterconcept to that which properly is, the *summum ens*, God as *ens increatum*. Here too the interpretation of the nothing indicates the fundamental conception of beings. But the metaphysical discussion of beings stays on the same level as the question of the nothing. The questions of being and of the nothing as such are not posed. Therefore no one is bothered by the difficulty that if God creates out of nothing precisely he must be able to comport himself to the nothing. But if God is God, he cannot know the nothing, assuming that the "Absolute" excludes all nothingness.

This cursory historical recollection shows the nothing as the counterconcept to that which properly is, i.e., as its negation. But if the nothing somehow does become a problem, then this opposition does not merely undergo a somewhat clearer determination; rather, it awakens for the first time the proper formulation of the metaphysical question concerning the being of beings. The nothing does not remain [17] the indeterminate opposite of beings but unveils itself as belonging to the being of beings.

"Pure Being and pure Nothing are therefore the same." This proposition of Hegel's (*Science of Logic*, Book I: *Werke*, vol. III, p. 74) is correct. Being and the nothing do belong together, not because both – from the point of view of the Hegelian concept of thought – agree in their indeterminateness

and immediacy, but rather because being itself is essentially finite and manifests itself only in the transcendence of a Dasein that is held out into the nothing.

Assuming that the question of being as such is the encompassing question of metaphysics, the question of the nothing proves to be such that it embraces the whole of metaphysics. But the question of the nothing pervades the whole of metaphysics since it forces us to face the problem of the origin of negation, that is, ultimately, to face up to a decision concerning the legitimacy of the dominion of "logic"[a] in metaphysics.

The old proposition *ex nihilo nihil fit* is therefore found to contain another sense, one appropriate to the problem of being itself, which runs: *ex nihilo omne ens qua ens fit* [From the nothing all beings as beings come to be]. Only in the nothing of Dasein do beings as a whole, in accord with their most proper possibility – that is, in a finite way – come to themselves. To what extent then has the question of the nothing, if it is a metaphysical question, implicated our questioning Dasein? We have characterized our Dasein, experienced here and now, as essentially determined by science. If our Dasein thus defined is implicated in the question of the nothing, then it must have become questionable through this question.

Scientific existence possesses its simplicity and aptness in that it comports itself toward beings themselves in a distinctive way, and only to them. Science would like to dismiss the nothing with a lordly wave of the hand. But in our inquiry concerning the nothing it has by now become manifest that such scientific existence is possible only if in advance it [18] holds itself out into the nothing. It understands itself for what it is only when it does not surrender the nothing. The presumed soberness of mind and superiority of science become laughable when it does not take the nothing seriously. Only because the nothing is manifest can science make beings themselves objects of investigation. Only if science exists on the basis of metaphysics can it fulfill in ever-renewed ways its essential task, which is not to amass and classify bits of knowledge, but to disclose in ever-renewed fashion the entire expanse of truth in nature and history.

Only because the nothing is manifest in the ground of Dasein can the total strangeness of beings overwhelm us. Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder. Only on the ground of wonder – the manifestness of the nothing – does the "why?" loom before us. Only because the "why" is possible as such can we in a definite way inquire into grounds and ground things. Only because we can question and

[a] First edition, 1929: I.e., always of traditional logic and its *logos* as origin of the categories.

ground things is the destiny of our existence placed in the hands of the researcher.

The question of the nothing puts us, the questioners, ourselves in question. It is a metaphysical question.

Human Dasein can comport itself toward beings only if it holds itself out into the nothing. Going beyond beings occurs in the essence of Dasein. But this going beyond is metaphysics itself. This implies that metaphysics belongs to the "nature of the human being." It is neither a division of academic philosophy nor a field of arbitrary notions. Metaphysics is the fundamental occurrence in our Dasein. It is that Dasein itself. Because the truth of metaphysics dwells in this abyssal ground it stands in closest proximity to the constantly lurking possibility of deepest error. For this reason no amount of scientific rigor attains to the seriousness of metaphysics. Philosophy can never be measured by the standard of the idea of science.

[19] If the question of the nothing unfolded here has actually questioned us, then we have not simply brought metaphysics before us in an extrinsic manner. Nor have we merely been "transposed" into it. We cannot be transposed into it at all, because insofar as we exist we are always already within it. Φύσει γάρ, ὦ φίλε, ἔνεστί τις φιλοσοφία τῇ τοῦ ἀνδρὸς διανοίᾳ ["For by nature, my friend, a human being's thinking dwells in philosophy"] (Plato, *Phaedrus*, 279a). As long as human beings exist, philosophizing of some sort occurs. Philosophy – what we call philosophy – is the getting under way of metaphysics, in which it comes to itself and to its explicit tasks.[a] Philosophy gets under way only by a peculiar insertion of our own existence into the fundamental possibilities of Dasein as a whole. For this insertion it is of decisive importance, first, that we allow space for beings as a whole; second, that we release ourselves into the nothing, that is to say, that we liberate ourselves from those idols everyone has and to which they are wont to go cringing; and finally, that we let the sweep of our suspense take its full course, so that it swings back into the fundamental question of metaphysics that the nothing itself compels: Why are there beings at all, and why not far rather Nothing?

[a] *Wegmarken*, first edition, 1967: Two things are said: "essence" of metaphysics and its own history in terms of the destining of being; both are later named in the "recovery" ["*Verwindung*"].